



Left: The first Capitol, circa 1860.
Below: The second Capitol, circa 1883.



THE CAPITOL STORY

When the Minnesota Territory was organized in 1849, the legislature held its first meetings in a log hotel in St. Paul. Not until five years later was the first Capitol finished and ready to be occupied. In 1881, the building was destroyed by a fire that broke out during a session of the legislature. When a second Capitol was completed the next year, it was already too small for the growing state.

In 1893, bills proposing a new statehouse were passed and a commission was appointed to undertake the project. In 1895, Cass Gilbert was selected as the architect after his design won a competition that included 40 other entries.

This third – and present – Minnesota State Capitol was an ambitious undertaking for a state that was only 37 years old. Channing Seabury, chairman of the Capitol Commission, broke ground for the new building on May 6, 1896. The cornerstone was laid in 1898 by Alexander Ramsey, first territorial governor and the second governor of the state. After nine years and a cost of \$4.5 million, the building was opened to the public on Jan. 2, 1905, one day before the 34th legislature convened.

CASS GILBERT

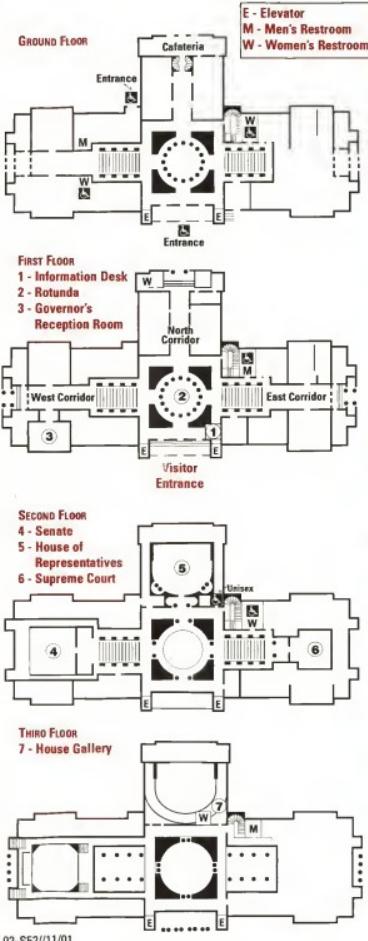
The Capitol, designed by Cass Gilbert, drew acclaim from the entire country. Architects and artists

praised its exterior, its huge marble dome, its self-supporting stairway and its magnificently decorated interior. Not only did Gilbert design the structure, he also supervised its construction and its decoration. "In the old days," he said, "the architect, the painter and the sculptor were frequently one and the same man. There is no reason why they should not be so now."

Among his other well-known public buildings are the Arkansas and West Virginia state capitols, and the United States Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C. His design for the Woolworth Building in New York City popularized the skyscraper.



Cass Gilbert, architect.



MINNESOTA STATE CAPITOL

Self-guided Tour



EXTERIOR

The exterior of the State Capitol is made of white Georgia marble and St. Cloud granite. Six marble statues above the main entrance greet visitors.

Daniel Chester French collaborated with Edward Potter to create the golden sculpture group at the base of the dome titled *The Progress of the State*,

commonly referred to as the Quadriga. Restoration was completed in 1995. The steel and copper sculpture, like the ball on top of the dome, is covered with gold leaf.



Left: The Quadriga.

Above: Governor's Reception Room, circa 1905.

INTERIOR

Cass Gilbert commissioned works of art to be placed throughout the building. More than 20 types of stone are used in the halls, stairways and chambers.

Prominent among the Minnesota stones is limestone from Mankato, which is used on the walls. The vaulted ceilings of the corridors are decorated with hand-painted arabesques and designs of grains and fruits grown in Minnesota.

First Floor

The large round area in the center of the building, the rotunda, extends from the first floor to the dome. In the center of the first floor is a large star, the symbol of the North Star State. The brass and glass design is repeated in the marble of the floor surrounding it. High overhead, hanging from the dome, is a chandelier six feet in diameter and made of crystal. The allegorical story, *The Civilization of the Northwest*, is told in four large murals at the base of the dome. Against the walls of the rotunda are glass cases displaying flags that were carried by Minnesota soldiers in the Civil and Spanish-American wars.

Governor's Reception Room

This room is ornately decorated with white oak woodwork and plaster of Paris symbols of Minnesota overlaid with gold leaf. In the center of the room is an original hand-carved mahogany table designed by Cass Gilbert. It is placed amid other historic furniture which has been returned to the Reception Room.

Six large paintings of scenes from Minnesota history adorn the walls. One is of Father Louis Hennepin at the Falls of St. Anthony, which he named in 1680 in honor of his patron saint. The painting directly opposite depicts the signing of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux in 1851. In this treaty with the Dakota Indians, the United States obtained land that now forms much of southern Minnesota.

The other paintings honor Minnesota regiments that fought in the Civil War. *The Battle of Nashville* is considered one of the finest war paintings of the period.

Second Floor

This is the "grand floor" of the Capitol. Here are the chambers of the Senate, the House of Representatives and the Supreme Court. The Senate



Left: Minnesota Senate Chamber.
Below: Minnesota House of Representatives in session.



Photo courtesy of Tom Olscheck

and House are restored to their 1905 appearance with skylights, original colors and furnishings, decorative art, and gold leaf. The band of red stone encircling the rotunda above the granite columns is Minnesota pipestone, from which many Indians have traditionally made calumets, or ceremonial pipes.

Senate

Sixty-seven senators are elected for four-year terms. The Senate and House meet in regular session each biennium for a total not exceeding 120 legislative days. At the front of the chamber are the desks of the Senate officers and the president of the Senate, who is elected by the Senate members. On the side walls are paintings by Edwin Blashfield. Below are two electronic voting boards that record senators' votes.

House of Representatives

This chamber is used not only for regular House sessions, but also for joint sessions of the legislature. The ceiling was decorated by E. E. Garnsey. The four names on the ceiling – La Salle, Hennepin, Perrot and Duluth – honor early French explorers in the Northwest. Public galleries, which may be entered from the third floor, face the sculpture group in the front titled *Minnesota, the Spirit of Government*, a 1938 addition designed by Carl Brioschi. The 134 representatives are elected for two years.

Supreme Court

Oral arguments are heard by the chief justice and six associate justices in this chamber, the highest court in the State of Minnesota. Facing the justices are benches for visitors who come to hear the court sessions. Paintings by John LaFarge symbolize concepts of the legal system. The room has been partially restored to its original appearance.

Rathskeller Cafeteria

Gilbert and Garnsey created this space to resemble a German eating hall. Restored in 1999 with its original German mottoes, small animals and floral designs, it recaptures the historic setting of 1905. It is open for public dining.

Guided Tours of the Minnesota State Capitol are provided year around, Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and Sundays from 1 to 4 p.m. Tours begin on the hour and are free. Hours may be subject to change. Please call ahead for auxiliary services and devices.

The Capitol Historic Site also offers special tours and events and educational programs. For more information and group reservations, call 651-296-2881, or e-mail statecapitol@mnhs.org.